

>> been a part of. Everything was new, no matter what it was.

Can you explain how it was different?

For one, an outside morgue is certainly different than anything I had ever seen. I had been to a morgue. I had been to an autopsy. The whole thing usually is very clean and sanitary and in a secluded area. I wasn't used to working with body parts while you're hearing horns honking 15 feet away.

I became a utility man, errand boy — anything they asked, you did it. It was very much a servant role there, which is why we did it. That's why we went up there. And sometimes you didn't know how to do your job, but there was no time to ask. You just go do your best. So, it was different. And the opportunities I had there to serve, there were so many, and I had so many varied opportunities.

One day, my task there was to escort a 23-year-old widow who lost her husband — he was a Port Authority police officer — and she wanted to see the site. They asked me if I would just walk her around the site. I escorted this girl around and tried to take on more of a chaplain role and just listen. I asked her questions about her husband and what he was like. At the site, all you heard was machinery. Cranes, trucks — all that, it was just constant. Whenever the workers would find a body part in

the pile, everything would come to a stop. If there were trucks getting loaded, they would shut them off. They had huge cranes like I have never seen

before. Everything quit and all of a sudden it was just completely quiet. They would send a chaplain and a group out and they would have a little service wherever they found this body part. They would have a prayer time. I don't care if it was a finger or a toe, everything came to a complete stop. They would come up with a full body bag and it was carried out with an escort.

While I was walking with her, that happened. She asked me what was going on and I told her. She said, 'I wonder if that's my husband?' And I just thought, 'Oh my God.'

How often did this happen?

If I worked three shifts, it would happen five or six times over the duration. Everything would come to a standstill.

When they were moving out debris, how did they separate the mangled buildings and rubble from the victims' remains?

There were trucks constantly coming in, scoops picking up debris, putting it in the trucks and the trucks went out to the landfill. It was a constant motion. They had huge crews at the landfill, and everything came down on a conveyor belt and they sifted through it for remains. They had cadaver dogs all over the place. Some of the cadaver dogs died from all the junk they were breathing in.

One of the most gripping things I saw there was in a building out at the landfill. When they would find people's ID cards, they had them all out on a table. You knew, if this guy's ID card is here — that's what they kept on them — he likely did not get out of the building. These people are probably all dead. You start seeing these faces — that was really something.

Was there one thing that was your primary role or responsibility while you were on site?

They had actually told us, you are not here to carry buckets. You are here to just go up and talk to people and see if you can get them to talk. These people needed some decompressing. Get them talking about anything. Any of the workers, anybody you want to walk up and talk to. My first thought was, these are New Yorkers. I'm from Kentucky. This is not going to work. So, I would just walk up and talk to people. That has never been a problem for me.

It amazed me that it didn't take much. It usually started out with them asking me if I was from Lexington, Mass. That's what they expected. When I told them Lexington, Ky., I was surprised by how many people had been to Kentucky. How many of them had been to Keeneland. They were all very gracious, and I talked to a whole lot of people. What's interesting is that I still get phone calls from people I talked to there. As a matter of fact, it has not been but a couple of months since someone called. I have a different cell phone number now than I did when I was at the police department, but I still have people tracking me down to talk and to thank me. Really, I didn't do anything. I didn't do anything. I was just there to talk to them.

Were there many people who really opened up about how the terrorist attacks had affected them or did you have people just want to talk?

Both. But what they did, when they started talking, they would talk and talk and talk. I knew from my education in counseling and critical incident stress that when somebody just keeps talking, talking is healing. Getting it out is a big deal. Sometimes you don't necessarily even have to talk about what the problem is. You're just talking. I would introduce myself and usually start off by asking, 'What is your job here?' At some point I might ask, 'Where were you when all this happened?' And boy, if you asked that, you were going to get an answer. Maybe they would bring me up to date from that time. They would tell me they had friends who were in the building — people who died, people they knew. I don't remember being turned down or shut down or anybody not talking. There was a lot of cop talk.

Were there any people or stories that have stuck with you?

Oh yeah. There was a fire captain named Capt. Chris O'Sullivan. I found him one day; he was sitting on a five-gallon bucket. He was probably 60 or so at that time. So I pulled up a bucket and talked to him. He asked me where I was from. When I said 'Lexington, Ky.' he said, 'What the hell are you doing up here?' And I said, 'Well, I'm just up here helping out,' and we started talking. He said, 'Have you gotten to do >>



◀ John Welsh holds a photo he shot of Ground Zero during his time there after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. Below are photos he shot as well as some that were given to him by others he worked with in New York City. Clockwise from top left is an American flag suspended among the wreckage, Welsh helping to look for the black box from one of the airplanes that struck the twin towers, a daytime shot of "the pile" and Welsh's Lexington Police cruiser parked in the center of downtown New York City.